

Caregiver Tip Sheet

Successful Parent Child Visits

Foster parents and kinship caregivers are essential partners in maintaining connections between children in out of home care and the people who are important to them.



Frequent and consistent parent and sibling visits support children's happiness and adjustment by decreasing fears of being abandoned, being in trouble, and losing everyone and everything.

Children need to be reassured that their parents have not abandoned them and what is happening is not their fault. Parents also have reactions to visits. They often feel pain, anger, guilt, anxiety, humiliation, and ambivalence about the loss of their child (Haight, Black, et al., 2001; Hess & Proch, 1988, Jenkins & Norman, 1975)

Visits are an emotional time and, at least until children adjust to their new circumstances, visits may renew their feelings of separation and loss, resulting in anxiety or negative behaviors before, during and after visits. This is not a reason to end parent-child visits, but may be a reason to increase visits to help a child cope with the separation.

Parent-child visits are never to be used as a reward or punishment. It is a right of the family.

Research shows children who have regular, frequent contact with their family while in foster care experience:

- A greater likelihood of reunification
- Shorter stays in out of home care
- Increased chances that reunification will be lasting
- Overall improved emotional wellbeing and positive adjustment to placement.

Caregiver Role:

- ✓ Participate in the development of a visit plan.
- ✓ Ensure the child is available for visits.
- ✓ Support parents' opportunity to maintain a relationship with their child.
- ✓ Respect the importance of the visitation plan, complying with its requirements and being willing to make reasonable adjustments to family plans to accommodate visitation.
- ✓ Participate in the logistics of visit planning whenever possible; be aware of visit dates, times, locations, transportation arrangements, and contact information for those involved.
- ✓ Provide information to the caseworker about the child's normal routines to help avoid disruption (school hours, after school activities, nap times, usual bed time).
- ✓ Communicate with the caseworker, family and transporter as needed to share updated information, and concerns.
- ✓ Help the transporter know the correct size/style of child safety seat needed.

Best Practice Recommendations for Foster Parents/Kinship Caregivers:

- ✓ Be actively involved in visits when possible, model healthy parent-child interactions and child care, if agreed to as part of the plan.
- ✓ Provide the child with emotional support even when the contacts with his parent and siblings are disrupting or confusing to the child.
- ✓ Have the child ready for each visit, including clothing packed for overnight visits. Dress the child appropriately for the location, weather and activity.
- ✓ Provide transportation or a place to visit when negotiated as part of the plan.



- ✓ Comfort and reassure a child or respond in other ways that are helpful to a child following a visit. Encourage the child's open expression of feelings about visiting.
- ✓ Speak positively about the parents to the child or to others.
- ✓ Notify the caseworker of any unplanned contacts between the child and parent.
- ✓ Ask the caseworker for help in navigating family dynamics if issues arise when you are a kinship caregiver.

Suggestions on how to promote a relationship with the child's parent:

(adapted from Lutheran Community services Northwest, Training Tape Handout, p. 1)

- ✓ Meet face-to-face by agreeing to transport the child to and from visits if possible.
- ✓ Talk to the parents about the child's likes, dislikes, daily activities, etc.
- ✓ Give the parents photographs, artwork, and school-work or allow the child to bring these items to visits.
- ✓ Provide a visit notebook that travels with the child so that you can inform the parent about the child and their activities while in your home. The parent can also contribute to the notebook.
- ✓ Inform the parents of the child's next doctor appointment/ parent-teacher conference so they can attend.
- ✓ Dress a young child in clothes provided or selected by the parents.
- ✓ Ask the parents about their traditions in order to support and honor the child's cultural heritage.
- ✓ Do not change the child's given name.
- ✓ Be honest, respectful and kind, regardless of the parents' actions.
- ✓ Refer to the child's parents as Mom and Dad.
- ✓ Get permission for haircuts, pierced ears, etc.

Continuing contact between children and their biological families is a fundamental ingredient of the children's sense of self, their sense of personal significance, and their sense of identity.
(Cantos et al., 1997)